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ABSTRACT

A mailed questionnaire was used to gather information about Montana's tribally controlled colleges and to determine: (1) what influenced students to attend the tribal colleges; (2) what their educational goals were; (3) whether the colleges assisted students in meeting goals; and (4) the degree of student satisfaction with college programs and services. A random sample of 1,472 students was drawn from the 4,420 students enrolled during each fall quarter from 1981 to 1985. From this sample 289 survey forms (20%) were completed and returned. The most important factor influencing respondents' participation at tribal colleges was that they considered other colleges to be located too far from home. A majority of respondents had practical career or advanced educational goals as well as personal development goals--to learn for learning's sake and to enrich their daily lives. In all cases, respondents indicated that the colleges had assisted them in meeting their goals. Overall, 94.7% were somewhat or very satisfied with their colleges. The greatest discontent--expressed by one-fourth of the respondents--was with availability of needed courses. Among students who left the tribal colleges before completing their educational goals, home responsibilities was the most frequently cited reason, followed by personal problems and insufficient money. (JHZ)

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AN ASSESSMENT OF STUDENT OUTCOMES AT TRIBALLY CONTROLLED COMMUNITY COLLEGES

A Paper Presented at the
18th Annual National Indian Education Association Conference
Reno, Nevada
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Affirmative Action and equal opportunity in postsecondary education have opened the doors to American Indians, who since the late 1960s have entered colleges in increasing numbers. Between 1965 and 1972, the number of Bureau of Indian Affairs Scholarship grantees grew from 1,718 to 12,748, representing a dramatic 642 percent increase.[1]

While the doors to higher education have indeed opened to American Indians, this apparent progress cannot be accepted uncritically in the absence of other, more recent data. For example, according to a nine-year longitudinal study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute, only 38.6 percent of American Indians who entered college in 1971 had completed the baccalaureate by 1980. A similar college completion rate of 39 percent was found in a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics. Further, while the proportion of American Indians among entering freshmen increased between 1966 and 1971, the proportion changed very little in the next ten-year period to 1980; and while the numbers of American Indian college students have increased, only 0.38 of one percent of all bachelor's degree awarded in the 1980-81 academic year were awarded to Indians, although they make up over one percent of the American population. Only 6 percent of all American Indians have completed college, compared to 23 percent of whites and 12 percent of blacks.[2] In Montana, a state with a significantly large Indian population, only 4.2 percent of the

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[1]Helen Maynor Scheirbeck et al., Report on Indian Education: Final Report to the American Indian Policy Review Commission (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1976), p. 271.

[2]Alexander W. Astin, Minorities in American Higher Education (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 1982), pp. 40-43, 80-81, 175; U.S. Office of Civil Rights.

Indians have completed college, compared to 15.7 percent for all races in the state.[3] In addition, Montana Indians represent only 2.8 percent of the higher education students in the state, although they make up 4.7 percent of the population. The underrepresentation was even more severe during the autumn quarter of 1986 at Montana State University (MSU), where Indians represented only 2.05 percent of the undergraduate enrollment and 1.1 percent of the graduate students.[4] Indeed, while advances clearly have been made, higher education for Indians remains a challenge to the reality of equal educational opportunity in Montana and the nation.

In addressing the dire social and economic problems facing their communities, Montana Indians have looked with hope to the development of their human resources through education. The Tribally Controlled Community Colleges have been one vehicle by which Montana tribes have exercised self-determination in an effort to address the needs and problems of their people.

In 1978, Congress passed the Tribally Controlled Community College Act, "to ensure continued and expanded educational opportunities for Indian students." In 1981, there were 16 tribal colleges serving 2,557 full-time equivalent Indian students and experiencing an annual growth rate of 16 percent.[5] During the 1985-86 year, the colleges served 3,059 full-time

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[3]United States Census, 1980.

[4]Astin, p. 138; United States Census, 1980; Montana State University Registrar.

[5]U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Fiscal Year 1981 Report to the Congress of the United States on the Tribally Controlled Community College Assistance Act of 1978, Public Law 95-471, September, 1982.

Indian students. Today, there are 21 tribally controlled community colleges in eight states, serving over 4,000 students.

In Montana, all seven reservations and their respective tribal governments have established a tribally controlled community college:

Community College	Tribes Served	Year of Charter
Blackfeet Community College	Blackfeet	1974
Dull Knife Memorial College	Northern Cheyenne	1975
Fort Belknap College	Assiniboine-Gros Ventre	1983
Fort Peck Community College	Assiniboine-Sioux	1978
Little Big Horn College	Crow	1977
Stone Child Community College	Chippewa-Cree	1984
Salish-Kootenai Community College	Salish-Kootenai	1977

The missions of these colleges, like those of other tribally controlled colleges in other states, reflect a variety of goals. Not only do they seek to develop their communities' human resources through academic and vocational training, but they also strive to preserve and transmit tribal culture and to provide service to their tribes. Currently, the largest portion of Native American postsecondary students in Montana attend the tribal community colleges. During Fall quarter 1983, for example, 44 percent attended tribal colleges compared to only 36 percent who enrolled within the Montana university system.[6] Thus, the tribal college has clearly emerged as a most significant and often preferred provider of postsecondary educational services.

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[6]The remaining Indian students attended state community colleges and private four-year colleges (Center for Native American Studies, Montana State University, Registrar Survey, February, 1984).

Although most observers agree that the tribally controlled colleges are meeting "the unique educational needs of reservation American Indians better than any existing institution of higher education," very little substantive research has been conducted to support this assertion.[7] No studies have been conducted to determine the educational outcomes of the tribal college experience. No data exists on student attitudes, student academic achievement, or student occupational, career, or personal development during or after college.

The Center for Native American Studies at Montana State University has begun to address the need for valid data on the outcomes of tribally controlled community colleges.[8] During the 1985-86 academic year, the Center conducted a preliminary student outcomes study, to determine (1) what influenced students to attend the tribal colleges, (2) what their educational goals were upon entering, (3) whether the colleges assisted the students in meeting their goals, and (4) the degree of student satisfaction with college programs and services.

Data were obtained from a survey of a random sample of all students who attended tribal colleges in Montana during each Fall quarter from 1981 through 1985. From the 4,420 students who enrolled in Montana's tribally controlled colleges during this period, a random sample of 1,472 students was drawn. The sample was stratified according to tribal college enrollment. A survey instrument was adapted from one developed and extensively

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[7]Norman T. Oppelt, "The Tribally Controlled Colleges in the 1980s: Higher Educations's Best Kept Secret," American Indian Culture and Research Journal 8 (1984), pp. 27, 41.

[8]This research was made possible in part by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, U.S. Department of Education Grant Number G008541023.

utilized by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, a recognized leader in student outcomes research. The content was, of course, designed to accommodate unique factors related to Indian students and to the tribal colleges.

The survey form was mailed to the sample of former and current students. To increase the response rate, a second mailing was sent to non-respondents. A total of 289 students completed and returned the survey form. Although this represented only a 20 percent return rate, the respondents constituted 6.5 percent of all students enrolled during the five-year period. Moreover, the demographic characteristics of this group were very similar to those of all former and returning tribal college students enrolled during Autumn quarter, 1986.[9] Thus, while a larger response rate was desireable, the survey data nevertheless represent the best--indeed, the only--student outcomes statistics available to assess the effectiveness of tribally controlled community colleges.

Of the survey respondents, 77.7 percent were former students who no longer attended a tribal college, and 22.3 percent were currently enrolled. 71 percent had attended a tribal college two quarters or more. Two-thirds of the respondents were full-time students, and the remainder enrolled for less than twelve credits per term. The majority (72.5 percent) were women, which is consistent with the preponderance of female enrollment at tribal

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[9]Montana Tribal College Development Program, A Survey of Returning Tribal College Students in Montana, Autumn Quarter 1986 (Unpublished Report), 1986.

colleges nationwide.[10] Most were beyond the traditional college age; 70.5 percent were 25 years of age or older.[11]

To determine what factors influenced their decisions to attend the tribal colleges, students were asked to rate the importance of listed influences in making their decision. Each item was rated on a four-point scale with the following values: 1 = Not Important, 2 = Of Little Importance, 3 = Somewhat Important, and 4 = Extremely Important.

As indicated in Table 1, tribal college students prefer to attend college in their own communities. The most important factor influencing these students participation at tribal colleges was that they considered other colleges to be located too far from home. Three-fourths of the respondents considered this an extremely important or somewhat important factor in their decision to attend a tribal college. The availability of all needed programs and services, the comparatively low cost to attend tribal colleges, and the high quality of education were also major factors, cited by three-fourths of the respondents as somewhat or extremely important. The lack of academic preparation, although cited in the literature as a major barrier to success in four-year institutions, was not perceived as a major influence to attend the community colleges. Indeed, 42 percent of the respondents considered this of no importance. Considering that two-thirds of the respondents were full-time students and that unemployment on Montana reservations ranges from 41 to 73 percent, it is not surprising that job

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[10] Oppelt, p. 38; A similar percentage of women, 71.7 percent, was found in a similar Fall quarter 1986 survey of all returning tribal college students.

[11] In the Fall quarter 1986 survey of all returning tribal college students, 60.6 percent were 25 years or older.

responsibilities did not prevent college attendance off the reservation; half of the respondents considered this of no importance. However, it was an extremely important factor for nearly a third of the respondents, suggesting that the tribal colleges serve a considerable number of working individuals, pursuing employment-related goals.

Table 1
Factors Influencing Student Enrollment in Tribal Colleges

Factor	Mean	SD
Other College Located Too Far from Home	3.13	1.10
All Needed Programs and Services Offered	3.05	1.07
Cost To Attend Tribal College Was Affordable	3.01	1.11
High Educational Quality at Tribal College	3.01	0.98
Family Responsibilities Prevented Attendance Elsewhere	2.73	1.31
Preference for Small College	2.31	1.19
Felt More Comfortable with Own Tribal Members	2.28	1.25
Not Academically Prepared for 4-year College	2.26	1.21
Job Prevented Attendance Off Reservation	2.24	1.36

Students attending the tribal colleges enter with a variety of educational and personal goals. To determine what these were, the survey instrument provided a list of common goals which students have when they enter a community college. Students were asked to indicate whether each of those listed was a goal of theirs. In addition, they were asked to evaluate how much help the college had been in their reaching these goals. Their choices

were as follows: 1 = Not Much Help, 2= Some Help, and 3 = A Great Deal of Help.

Table 2 indicates that the tribal colleges meet a variety of needs and goals among the students they serve. Contrary to the belief of many outside observers, these colleges are not merely preparing students to transfer to four-year institutions. Only half of the respondents indicated a goal related to the transfer function of the tribal colleges, i.e., to complete courses necessary to transfer to a four-year college and to improve basic skills before transferring to a four-year college. 50 percent indicated as a goal the earning of an associate's degree, which serves both as a terminal degree and as preparation for transfer to larger institutions. Similarly, approximately half of the respondents have vocational goals--improving job skills and opportunities for advancement, discovering a vocational interest, earning or updating vocational certification, and preparing for a new career. It is noteworthy that a majority of the respondents have, in addition to practical career or advanced educational goals, personal developmental goals--to develop personally, to learn for learning's sake, and to enrich their daily lives.

Table 2

Student Identification of Educational Goals and Degree to Which Tribal Colleges Assisted in Attaining Goals

Goal	% Yes Responses	Mean Rating of College*
To Complete High School (G.E.D.)	14.6	2.60
To Improve Basic Skills Before Transfer to Four-Year College	58.7	2.53
To Learn Specific Skills That Will Enrich Daily Life	82.0	2.51
To Prepare for New Career	65.7	2.51
To Learn for Learning's Sake	79.6	2.50
To Develop Personally	78.2	2.49
To Improve Present Job Skills	55.0	2.49
To Earn an Associate's Degree	50.4	2.48
To Earn a Vocational Certificate	32.4	2.44
To Complete Courses Necessary for Transfer to 4-Year College	44.5	2.44
To Increase Chances for Possible Pay Raise or Job Promotion	43.9	2.39
To Discover Vocational Interest	45.3	2.37
To Update Teaching/Voc-Ed Certificate	22.1	2.27

*Mean Rating of how much help the tribal college was in achieving the goal.

Regarding the degree to which the tribal colleges assisted their students to achieve personal and educational goals, in all cases, the students indicated that the colleges have been of some degree of help. The mean rating on most variables fell mid-range between "some help" and "a great deal of help." This would suggest that the tribally controlled

college are meeting a major goal in assisting the personal development and academic advancement of the students they serve.

Students were asked to indicate how satisfied they were with their experiences in a variety of areas. Students evaluated their satisfaction on a four-point scale: 1 = Very Dissatisfied, 2 = Somewhat Dissatisfied, 3 = Somewhat Satisfied, and 4 = Very Satisfied. Table 3 demonstrates that the respondents clearly reveal a favorable perception of the tribal colleges. The vast majority indicate some degree of satisfaction on all variables. On their overall impression of the colleges, 94.7 percent were somewhat or very satisfied. The respondents indicated very little dissatisfaction with the tribal colleges. The greatest discontent was on the availability of needed courses; on that, one-fourth of the respondents expressed dissatisfaction. This finding is not surprising considering that all Montana tribal colleges have very small enrollments and meager resources which preclude the offering of extensive curricula.

Table 3
Percentages and Means of Student Rating on Satisfaction with Tribal College

Variable Rated	Degree of Satisfaction				
	1	2	3	4	Mean
Overall Impression of the College	0.4	5.0	44.3	50.4	3.45
Accessibility of Instructors	1.4	7.2	39.1	52.3	3.42
Overall Quality of Instruction	1.1	6.7	42.8	49.5	3.41
Overall Impression of Major Courses	2.9	5.4	45.6	46.0	3.35
Convenience of Time Courses Offered	3.2	16.7	35.6	44.5	3.21
Instructors Help With Career Plans	3.0	11.6	39.6	45.9	3.28
Availability of Needed Courses	4.0	19.8	39.6	36.6	3.09

Students were also asked to rate their satisfaction on a variety of academic programs and student services, using the same four-point scale as in Table 3. Table 4 indicates general student satisfaction with all tribal college programs and services. The highest rated were admissions office information and Native American Studies; 90 percent of the respondents who used these programs indicated that they were somewhat or very satisfied. Respondents rated student services, including career development, testing, and placement services, comparatively low on satisfaction. This can be attributed to the small size of student services staff, which at most colleges includes only a financial aid officer and registrar. The comparatively low satisfaction rating on college preparatory/transfer programs and on assistance in transfer to a four-year college may suggest the need to increase efforts in this area.

Table 4
Percentage and Mean Ratings of
Student Satisfaction With Tribal College Programs and Services

Program/Service	0*	Degree of Satisfaction 1	2	3	4	Mean
Admissions Office Information	10.6	1.6	8.3	37.5	52.6	3.69
Native American Studies	35.3	3.3	6.1	31.7	58.9	3.46
Basic Skills (Writing, Math)	37.9	1.1	5.2	44.3	49.4	3.42
Registration	4.9	2.2	8.1	41.7	48.0	3.35
Library	28.4	2.5	12.1	34.2	51.3	3.34
College Cultural Programs	43.0	4.4	10.1	34.8	50.6	3.31
Associate's Degree Program	48.2	7.1	7.1	34.3	51.4	3.30
Financial Aid Office	30.2	5.7	13.9	26.8	53.6	3.28
Academic Advising	31.2	4.2	15.1	30.7	50.0	3.27
Vocational Training Programs	68.9	5.9	12.9	32.9	48.2	3.24
Guidance/Counseling Services	42.4	3.8	14.4	37.5	44.4	3.23
Testing Services	41.3	3.7	12.3	42.0	42.0	3.22
Career Development	44.9	5.3	16.4	36.8	41.4	3.14
Recreation/Athletic Programs	61.3	9.4	14.2	29.2	47.2	3.14
Transfer to 4-Year College Help	62.8	11.7	12.7	33.3	42.2	3.06
College Prep/Transfer Programs	60.7	10.2	12.1	39.3	38.3	3.06
Student Employment Services	51.8	10.4	20.2	29.9	39.5	2.99
Job Placement Services	68.4	16.3	24.4	31.4	27.9	2.71

*0 = Percentage Indicating Program/Service never used or not available.

Of the survey respondents, 75 percent were former students who were not currently enrolled in the tribal colleges. Of these, 19.5 percent indicated they had successfully completed a degree or certificate program; 23.9

percent successfully completed their educational goals; and 6.8 percent were enrolled in four-year institutions. Of the respondents who indicated that they were not currently enrolled at a tribal college, 49.8 percent indicated that they left the tribal colleges before completing their educational goals. This group of respondents were asked to consider a list of academic, employment, financial, and personal reasons for leaving college and to indicate to what extent these were their reasons for leaving the tribal college. Their choices were as follows: 1 = Not a Reason, 2 = Moderate Reason, and 3 = Major Reason. According to Table 5, more than half the students who left without completing their goals indicated that academic factors were not reasons for their leaving. Among the academic reasons, the inavailability of desired majors or courses proved to be predominant. Employment and financial reasons were even more significant, particularly the scheduling conflict between job and studies and insufficient funds to attend college; almost half of the respondents indicated these as moderate or major reasons. Among personal reasons, home responsibilities and personal problems were the highest ranked factors in not returning to college.

Students were then asked to indicate the three most important reasons for not returning to college. The most frequently cited reason was home responsibilities, indicated by 27.5 percent of those who did not complete their educational goals. Personal problems followed with 24.5 of the non-returning respondents indicating this among the three most important reasons. 22.5 percent indicated that insufficient money to go to college was among their three major reasons for not returning, and 21.6 percent indicated that the inavailability of their desired major or courses was a

decisive factor. 19.6 percent indicated that they needed a temporary break from studies, which would suggest that these "stop outs" may be likely to return to college to pursue their educational goals. Although indicated by only 11.8 percent of the non-returners as being among the three major reasons for not returning, scheduling conflict between job and studies and accepting a job were frequently cited by respondents with approximately one-fourth of the non-returners indicating this as a major reason.

Dissatisfaction with the tribal colleges did not emerge as a major reason for not completing educational goals. Neither was inadequate study skills or academic preparation considered a predominant reason, although these have been found to be major barriers to success at four-year institutions.[12]

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[12]Patricia Porter McNamara, American Indians in U.S. Higher Education (Los Angeles: Higher Education Research Institute, 1984), p. 141.

Table 5
Reasons for Not Completing Goals at Tribal Colleges in Percentages

Reason	Percentage of Response 1	2	3	Mean
Academic Reasons				
Major or Courses Not Available	69.5	16.0	14.5	1.450
Unsure about Choice of Major/Program	71.8	19.8	8.4	1.366
Needed Temporary Break from Studies	76.7	14.7	8.5	1.318
Inadequate Study Techniques or Habits	77.5	17.8	4.7	1.271
Dissatisfied with Quality of Teaching	81.8	12.9	5.3	1.235
Low Grades	83.2	12.2	4.6	1.214
Dissatisfaction with Major Department	86.2	8.5	5.6	1.192
Inadequate Prep in Math Skills	89.1	8.6	2.3	1.133
Found Courses Too Difficult	90.7	7.0	2.3	1.116
Inadequate Prep in English Skills	92.2	6.3	1.6	1.094
Course Work Not Challenging	92.4	6.1	1.5	1.092
Employment Reasons				
Scheduling Conflict Between Job/Studies	54.9	19.5	25.6	1.707
Accepted a Job	65.4	8.5	26.2	1.608
Couldn't Find Job While in School	86.7	7.8	5.5	1.188
Went into Military Service	99.2	0.0	.8	1.016
Financial Reasons				
Not Enough Money to Go to College	52.6	19.5	27.8	1.752
Childcare Too Costly	69.5	16.8	13.7	1.443
Financial Aid Was Not Sufficient	70.8	17.7	11.5	1.408
Could Not Obtain Financial Aid	80.0	9.2	10.8	1.308
This College Too Expensive	93.8	4.7	1.6	1.078

Table 5 (Continued)
Reasons for Not Completing Goals at Tribal Colleges in Percentages

Reason	Percentage of Response 1	2	3	Mean
Personal Reasons				
Home Responsibilities Too Great	46.2	27.3	26.5	1.803
Personal Problems	63.3	14.1	22.7	1.594
Illness (Personal or Family)	79.2	9.2	11.5	1.323
Childcare Not Available	79.1	10.1	10.9	1.318
Fulfilled Personal Educational Goals*	79.5	9.4	11.0	1.315
Marital Situation Changed Plans	82.3	8.5	9.2	1.269
Found Study Time Too Time-Consuming	80.6	14.7	4.7	1.240
Moved Out of the Area	87.5	6.3	6.3	1.188

*102 respondents indicated that they left the college before completing their educational goals. However, 131 nevertheless responded to the list of reasons for leaving college. This would account for the 26 respondents who indicated that they left because they fulfilled their personal educational goals.

This seminal study provides preliminary evidence that tribally controlled community colleges are meeting varied needs of reservation Indian students, many of whom by virtue of family and home responsibilities, financial reasons, and job responsibilities would not enjoy access to postsecondary educational opportunities. Moreover, it demonstrates that students are overwhelmingly satisfied with the programs and services offered at these developing institutions. The investigation also suggests factors which contribute to student attrition, alerting tribal colleges to specific targets in their retention efforts. Finally, this study suggests new areas of research in a field which remains largely unexplored. How do tribal

college transfer students perform academically upon entering four-year institutions? To what extent have tribal colleges, through vocational education and other human resource development programs, impacted the high reservation unemployment rates? How do tribal college students and their educational goals differ from those of more traditional community college students, and how do tribal colleges address the differences? How do attrition and retention rates at the tribal colleges compare with those of four-year institutions serving American Indian students? In an era of scarce resources and the demand for accountability in higher education, the need to answer these and other questions will become imperative. In this light, then, the greatest significance of this study may well be in its effort to incite further research which can not only evidence the positive outcomes, but also assist the further development of the emerging tribally controlled community colleges.